Adjective Formation

CEFR C2 · Derivation at the limits: morphology, productivity, corpus and style
WS1 Morphology & Productivity · WS2 Corpus, Register & Variation · WS3 Coinage, Style & Nonce Words · WS4 Scholarly Analysis & Writing · Answer Key

Worksheet 1: Morphology & Productivity

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: How Adjective-Forming Suffixes Behave

Derivational suffixes differ in **productivity** (how freely they coin new words), in the **base** they select (Latinate vs Germanic; noun vs verb), and in whether they trigger **allomorphy** and **stress shift**. Highly productive suffixes (**-y, -ish, -like, -able**) coin nonce forms freely; unproductive ones (**-th, -some, -ly** as adj) are largely frozen. Constraints include **blocking**, the **Latinate restriction** on -ity/-ation, and the stress-shifting behaviour of **-ic, -ial, -ity**.

Property	Description	Example
Productivity	freedom to coin	-able, -ish, -y high; -th, -some low
Base selection	word-class/etymology of base	-ous prefers Latinate; -ful prefers native
Stress shift	suffix relocates stress	'atom → a'tomic; 'origin → o'riginal
Allomorphy	base alternation	-ic + -ity → -icity (electric→electricity)
Blocking	existing word bars a form	*stealer blocked by thief

Part A – Theoretical Analysis

1. Define **morphological productivity** and rank *-able, -ous, -th* by productivity, giving evidence (e.g. ability to coin nonce forms such as *Zoomable, tweetable*).
2. Explain the difference between **class-1 (stress-shifting, Latinate)** and **class-2 (stress- neutral)** suffixes, using *-ic* vs *-ish* and the pairs *átom/atómic* and *bóy/bóyish*.
3. *-able* attaches productively to verbs (*readable*) but also to some nouns (*fashionable, marriageable*). Analyse what this tells us about its semantics ("able to be Xed" vs "suitable for X") and its category flexibility.

Score: ____ / 20

Worksheet 2: Corpus, Register & Variation

Name: _____ *Date:* _____ *Level: C2 (CEFR)*

Reference: What Corpora Reveal

Corpus data show that adjective-forming suffixes distribute by register: **-able, -ive, -ory, -ial** are dense in academic and legal prose; **-y, -ish** skew informal/ spoken; neologisms in **-able** and **-y** proliferate in journalism and social media (*bingeable, scrolly*). Productivity is measurable (hapax legomena as a proxy). British and American preferences diverge (*-ise/-ize* derivatives; *-t/-ed* participial adjectives).

Register	Favoured suffixes	Example
Academic / scientific	-ive, -ory, -ial, -able	explanatory, dimensional
Legal / official	-able, -ory, -ent	actionable, mandatory
Journalism / media	-able, -y (neologisms)	bingeable, clickbaity
Informal / spoken	-ish, -y	sketchy, smallish
Productivity proxy	hapax count / neologisms	-able coins freely

Part A – Diagnose Register & Productivity

#	Adjective in context	Register / productivity note
1	a highly actionable set of recommendations	
2	the whole vibe was a bit sketchy	
3	an explanatory framework for the variance	
4	the show is endlessly bingeable	

Part B – Rate the Coinage

For each nonce adjective, say whether the suffix licenses it and how transparent it is.

1. swipeable _____
2. ghostish _____
3. *strengthful _____

Part C – Register-Corpus Map

Place each in its most likely corpus: *justiciable · smallish · dimensional · scrolly · compensatory*

Corpus	Forms
Legal / official	
Academic / scientific	
Journalism / media	

Informal / spoken	

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 3: Coinage, Style & Nonce Words

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: Derivation as a Creative Resource

Writers coin adjectives for effect: transparent nonce forms (*-able, -y, -ish, -esque*) create compression, novelty, or irony; **-esque** and **-ian** evoke a named style (*Kafkaesque, Dickensian*); playful **-y/-ish** forms signal informality or hedging. Mastery is coining forms a reader accepts effortlessly, and knowing when a coinage reads as witty versus strained.

Device	Effect	Example
-esque	in the style of	Kafkaesque, picturesque
-ian / -esque (proper noun)	evoking a figure/era	Orwellian, Dickensian
-able (nonce)	compression / novelty	un-put-down-able
-ish (hedge)	approximation / irony	gothic-ish, fine-ish
-y (informal coinage)	casual tone	shouty, moreish

Part A – Interpret the Coinage

1. "a Kafkaesque bureaucracy" _____
2. "an un-put-down-able thriller" _____
3. "a shouty, clickbaity headline" _____
4. "the plan is fine-ish, I suppose" _____

Part B – Coin with Control

Coin a transparent adjective for each meaning and name the suffix.

1. (able to be streamed) → _____
2. (in the style of Orwell) → _____
3. (somewhat bureaucratic, hedged) → _____

Part C – Witty or Strained?

Judge each coinage and justify.

#	Coinage	Witty / strained + why
1	"a very Marmite-y opinion"	
2	"an interrogability metric"	
3	"a delightfully unbotherable host"	

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 4: Scholarly Analysis & Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Part A – Critical Text Analysis

> The adjective-forming suffix is a small thing with a large reach. That English can turn almost any noun -y or any verb -able is a mark of the language's derivational openness; the price of that openness is a certain instability, for a form that is transparent today — Zoomable, scrollable — may be opaque or obsolete tomorrow. The productive suffixes are the promiscuous ones, attaching where they will and coining nonce words no dictionary records; the frozen suffixes, -th and its kind, keep to the handful of forms they inherited. It is, one might say, a division between the living and the embalmed — and the living, as ever, are the harder to legislate.

1. Identify every derived adjective (including nonce and compound forms) and classify each by suffix and productivity.
2. "promiscuous" and "embalmed" are used metaphorically of morphology. Analyse the conceit and its aptness for productivity/frozenness.
3. The passage claims transparent forms "may be opaque or obsolete tomorrow." Evaluate this with reference to lexicalisation and blocking.
4. Assess how the passage's own coinages (its -able and -y examples) enact its thesis about derivational openness.

Part B – Extended Scholarly Writing

Write the opening two paragraphs (220–260 words) of a scholarly essay on: "Adjectival derivation is where a language's productivity is most visible — and most contested." Requirements — include and underline: (1) one **highly productive suffix** used in a coinage you justify; (2) one **frozen/ unproductive suffix** discussed as such; (3) one **stress-shifting (class-1) derivative**; (4) one precise **metalinguistic term** (productivity, allomorphy, blocking, hapax, lexicalisation, Latinate) used correctly; (5) two **epistemic hedges** calibrated to each claim; (6) one **conjunct** that maps the argument's logic precisely.

#	Line
1	
2	
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7	

8	

Features: _____ / 6 Word count: _____ Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — C2 Level, Adjective Formation

Worksheet 1 – Part A (model)

1 Productivity = the extent to which an affix is used to coin new words (measurable via neologism/hapax counts). Ranking: -able (very high — freely coins *Zoomable, tweetable*) > -ous (moderate, largely confined to established Latinate bases) > -th (frozen — *warmth, width*, coins nothing new). · 2 Class-1 suffixes are typically Latinate, phonologically integrated, and shift stress (atom → aTOMic; origin → oRIGinal); class-2 suffixes are stress-neutral and attach transparently (BOYish, not *boYish). -ic is class-1 (stress-shifting), -ish class-2 (stress-neutral). · 3 On verbs -able means "able to be Ved" (readable = able to be read); on nouns it means "suitable for / fit for X" (marriageable = fit for marriage). Its ability to take both bases shows -able is semantically flexible and highly productive, with the passive-potential meaning as its core and the "fit for" meaning as an extension.

Worksheet 2 – Part A (model)

1 legal/business — *actionable*, -able formal. · 2 informal/spoken — *sketchy*, -y colloquial. · 3 academic — *explanatory*, -ory. · 4 media/journalism — *bingeable*, productive -able neologism.

Worksheet 2 – Part B (model)

1 swipeable — licensed (-able + transactional verb), fully transparent. · 2 ghostish — licensed (-ish is productive), transparent but informal/playful. · 3 *strengthful — blocked/odd: "strong" already supplies the adjective, and -ful prefers other bases; "powerful/strong" used instead.

Worksheet 2 – Part C

Legal: justiciable. · Academic: dimensional / compensatory. · Journalism: scrolly. · Informal: smallish. (compensatory may also appear in legal; accept with justification.)

Worksheet 3 – Part A (model)

1 nightmarish/absurd bureaucracy in the manner of Kafka; -esque evokes a named style. · 2 so gripping it can't be put down; a transparent nonce -able built on a phrasal verb. · 3 informal, pejorative coinages (-y) conveying a loud, sensational headline. · 4 -ish hedges the approval, ironic/tentative.

Worksheet 3 – Part B (model)

1 streamable (-able) · 2 Orwellian (-ian) · 3 bureaucratic-ish / bureaucraticish (-ish).

Worksheet 3 – Part C (model)

1 witty — "Marmite-y" cleverly invokes the love-it-or-hate-it brand; transparent -y. · 2 strained — "interrogability" stacks -able + -ity into an opaque abstract noun; jargonish. · 3 witty — "unbotherable" (un- + bother + -able) is transparent and apt. Accept reasoned alternatives.

Worksheet 4 – Part A (model)

1 derivational (-al), transparent (-ent + -), Zoomable/scrollable/-able (productive, nonce), productive (-ive), promiscuous (-ous), frozen (participial adj), -th "and its kind" (frozen suffix named), embalmed (participial). Classify -able/-y as productive; -th, -ous(here established), -al as varyingly productive. · 2 The conceit maps morphology onto life/sexuality: productive suffixes are "promiscuous" (attaching freely, indiscriminately), frozen ones "embalmed" (preserved, lifeless). Apt because productivity is precisely about freedom of combination vs fixed inheritance; the metaphor also smuggles in an evaluative liveliness. · 3 Sound: transparent coinages can lexicalise

(acquiring idiosyncratic meaning) or be blocked/replaced; *Zoomable* may fade with the platform, and today's nonce form may either enter the lexicon or vanish, so transparency is time-indexed. · 4 The passage coins/uses -able and -y forms (Zoomable, scrollable, -y) to demonstrate the openness it describes; its prose is self-exemplifying, which is both rhetorically effective and mild evidence for the claim.

Worksheet 4 – Part B: Marking Rubric

Criterion	Descriptor at C2	Marks
Productive-suffix coinage	Justified, transparent	0–5
Frozen suffix discussed	Correctly identified as unproductive	0–5
Class-1 derivative	Stress-shift handled correctly	0–5
Metalinguistic accuracy	Term used correctly, no overclaiming	0–5
Epistemic calibration	Two hedges matched to claim strength	0–5
Argument & length	220–260 words; contestable claim developed	0–5

The C2 benchmark is conscious control of derivation: a student who coins a transparent nonce adjective and can explain, in a footnote, why its suffix is productive while another is frozen has demonstrated mastery.